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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 1050
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1149
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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1168
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY 4102
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 001096

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DEPT FOR AF/S S. HILL, EUR/WE LARREA
ROME FOR VATICAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [VT](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE: CHURCH LEADERS CAUTIOUS ON VATICAN ROLE

REF: A. STATE 036885

[1](#)B. VATICAN 0064

[1](#)C. PRETORIA 0957

Classified By: Ambassador Eric M. Bost. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Vatican shares U.S. concerns about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, but will be cautious about speaking out publicly, according to Papal Nuncio Green. Public comments by the Pope are the final card to play, and the Vatican will want to save that step for the right moment. Durban-based Cardinal Napier recently spoke with Harare Archbishop Ndlovu, and said the Catholic Church was considering a pastoral visit from regional church leaders and/or a public statement. While Catholic Church leaders in South Africa are concerned about the deteriorating situation, they are reluctant to get too far in front of the bishops in Zimbabwe. A clear signal from Archbishop Ndlovu in Harare might free Napier and other Catholic leaders to speak out more forcefully. Senior Catholic and Anglican leaders from South Africa are planning a pastoral visit to Zimbabwe after Easter; organizers wish to keep this visit quiet, for the time being. END SUMMARY.

Papal Nuncio Says Papal Statement Final Step

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador delivered Ref A points to Papal Nuncio James Green, who is an American, on March 28, highlighting the continued suffering of the Zimbabwean people. Green confirmed that the Vatican shares U.S. concerns and is following the situation closely. Green noted that a public statement by the Pope is the final card to play, and the Vatican wants to save Papal intervention for the right moment ("you don't want to swing at every pitch"). Once the Pope speaks out, there is little else the Vatican can do except repeat his comments.

[1](#)3. (C) Green noted that the situation in Zimbabwe is particularly embarrassing because Mugabe "pretends to be" a practicing Catholic. Mugabe carries around a rosary, which he pulls out and shows people.

[1](#)4. (C) Green said that he recently spoke with his counterpart in Zimbabwe, Edward Adams. Adams is deeply concerned about the situation. He believes his phone is tapped, and Green

and Adams spoke in code ("some Latin, some Italian"). Green also expressed his surprise and frustration with the South African Government's lack of public support for democracy and human rights, a stance he finds ironic given the international support for the anti-apartheid struggle.

Cardinal Napier Discusses Interim Steps

¶5. (C) Drawing on Ref A points, Consul General Durban informed Cardinal Wilfred Napier on March 26 of Embassy Vatican City's meetings with Vatican officials, noting that the Ambassador would be calling on the Papal Nuncio. Napier reported that he had spoken with Archbishop Buti Tlhagale, president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), and Archbishop of Harare Robert Ndlovu following his March 13 meeting (Ref C) with the CG and PolOffs. (NOTE: The SACBC covers South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland -- not/not Zimbabwe. END NOTE.) During these conversations, they discussed two options: (1) a pastoral visit to Zimbabwe to include unnamed senior clerics, and/or (2) a public statement condemning the situation in Zimbabwe. Napier said his colleagues were inclined to move forward with a pastoral visit, likely to take place after Easter, but had made no decision about a public statement. Ndlovu and Tlhagale were concerned that a public statement might "jeopardize the current discussions" and the long-term prospects of constitutional change. Napier commented that they were too focused on the long term and not enough on the immediate situation, which needed a response now.

¶6. (C) Napier said he had also spoken with Anglican Bishop

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Peter John Lee in Cape Town about the situation in Zimbabwe. Lee had spoken to DepForMin Aziz Pahad to offer any assistance the SAG deemed useful, but he did not have anything substantial to report from the meeting. Napier said he had not yet been successful in reaching Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube but said he would continue to try. He thought that the Archbishop sounded "desperate" in his "very strong" statements. Napier said he had been in regular contact with Selvan Chetty of the Solidarity Peace Trust, who was in frequent contact with church officials in Zimbabwe.

¶7. (C) Napier agreed that the situation in Zimbabwe was getting "desperate" and required immediate action in addition to the long-term process of changes currently being discussed. He said he would contact his counterparts again to discuss the situation.

Solidarity Peace Trust Organizing Visit

¶8. (C) PolOff spoke separately to Selvan Chetty of the Solidarity Peace Trust (SPT) on March 28, who said he was organizing a visit to Zimbabwe for senior South African church leaders (NOTE: likely the same visit referred to by Napier in para 5). SPT is a South African organization, co-chaired by Archbishop Pius Ncube and Anglican Bishop Rubin Phillip, that assists victims of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. The three-day visit would take place immediately after Easter, possibly Easter Monday, and would include Napier, the SACBC's Tlhagale, Phillip, and possibly Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane. Chetty said he was struggling with Church politics in Zimbabwe since Harare Archbishop Ndlovu had some reservations about the trip, but that Napier was willing to "run over" Ndlovu if necessary. Chetty cautioned that he is trying to keep the visit quiet, because he fears that Mugabe might try to stop it if he learns about the trip in advance.

Comment

19. (C) Catholic Church leaders in South Africa share U.S. concerns about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, but are reluctant to get too far in front of the bishops in Zimbabwe. A clear signal from Archbishop Ndlovu in Harare would go a long way toward freeing Napier and other Catholic leaders to speak out more forcefully about the tragic situation in Zimbabwe. Napier, who expressed public concern about the situation March 14 following our last meeting with him, is devoting considerable time and energy to Zimbabwe issues and will likely continue to work on Ndlovu. While Green did not explicitly say that he would raise the matter with Vatican officials, Zimbabwe is clearly on his mind, and we suspect he will do so.

BOST